

Testimony In Re: HB6884
An Act Concerning the Recruitment, Retention, and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession

March 12, 2023

Hon. Jeff Currey, Co-Chair, Education Committee
Hon. Doug McCrory, Co-Chair, Education Committee
Hon. Kathleen McCarty, Ranking Member
Hon. Eric Berthel, Ranking Member

Members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on HB6884. There are many important proposals in this bill for which I'm sure you will hear much support. However, **I'd like to highlight Sec. 3** which addresses pandemic bonuses to teachers who retire between July 1, 2026 and July 1, 2035.

I retired from teaching as of July 1, 2021 after 37 years of teaching, 36 of those years in CT public schools. If I am reading this language correctly, a teacher who taught during the pandemic years but has recently retired or who retires prior to July 1, 2026 receives no service year enhancement or benefit of any kind for sticking with teaching and showing up each day during the pandemic, ready to bring our depth of experience to helping our colleagues and our students navigate completely uncharted waters. I would like to point out that these people, including myself, were in a high-risk group due to our age and continued to teach even before the vaccine was available. We didn't have to. Many of us were eligible to retire pre-pandemic and certainly could have walked out the door and avoided the risks posed to us at work. Many of us experienced the trauma of seeing colleagues and students' family members die at the height of COVID-19's ravaging of our communities.

This feels like a slap in the face to those of us who chose to support our profession through the COVID-19 pandemic. And for those who have continued on but are eligible for retirement, what is your message to them? That you will hold them hostage for 3 more years if they want to be eligible for this enhancement to their pensions? That they should continue to put their lives at risk in a world that is not COVID free, and their retirement on hold?

I respectfully request that you amend the language to 1) provide a comparable one time pandemic payment to teachers who retired as of July 1, 2021 and July 1, 2022 OR a retroactive pension enhancement; 2) include in the pension enhancement those teachers who retire as of July 1, 2023 and each year thereafter.

Thank you for your consideration,

Lisa Thomas
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